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ABSTRACT

This report comments on findings from research and evaluation of both the implementation and the changes that the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 made to Title I of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), with a particular focus on findings released since 1999. The report emphasizes recommendations made in April 1999 and adds others based on findings presented in the U.S. Department of Education's 2001 report, "High Standards for All Students: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I on Progress and Challenges since the 1994 Reauthorization." The report is presented by the Independent Review Panel, a Congressionally mandated, non-partisan panel of educators, researchers, and policy experts that advises the Secretary of Education on the evaluation of federal education programs. This report frames key issues related to the new approach to educational improvement embodied in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA, proposing improvements in federal policy. It reviews changes that Congress made to Title I in 1994, particularly its mandate to raise standards for all children. Next, it lists the guiding assumptions behind the new approach to Title I, which makes it easier to judge whether the assumptions have proven true. The report then discusses ways in which implementation at the state and local level is not complete. The final section offers policy recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of standards-based reform and the new Title I. (SM)

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improving the odds

A REPORT ON TITLE I

FROM THE INDEPENDENT

REVIEW PANEL

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Independent Review Panel

Christopher Cross
Chairman, Independent Review Panel and
President, Council for Basic Education

Joyce Benjamin
Vice-Chair, Independent Review Panel
Associate Superintendent
Oregon Department of Education

Eva Baker
Co-Director, Center for Research on Evaluation,
Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)
University of California at Los Angeles

Rolf Blank
Director, Education Indicators Program
Council of Chief State School Officers

David Cohen
Professor
University of Michigan

George Corwell
Associate Director for Education
New Jersey Catholic Conference

Sharon Darling
President
National Center for Family Literacy

Bill Demmert
Director, Native American Institute
Western Washington University

Joyce Epstein
Director, Center on School, Family
and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University

Susan Fuhrman
Dean, Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania

Jack Jennings
Director
Center on Education Policy

Joseph F. Johnson, Jr.
Director, District Support and Services
Charles A. Dana Center
University of Texas at Austin

Diana Lam
Superintendent
Providence (RI) School Department

Wayne Martin
Director, State Education Assessment Center
Council of Chief State School Officers

Phyllis McClure
Independent Consultant on Education and Equity

Jessie Montano
Assistant Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Children,
Families, and Learning

Jennifer O'Day
Assistant Professor
University of Wisconsin at Madison

Andrew Porter
Director, Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin at Madison

Linda Rodriguez
Former Supervisor of Title I
Pasco (FL) County School Board

Richard Ruiz
Professor
University of Arizona

Ramsay Selden
Director, Education Statistics Services Institute
American Institutes for Research

Maris Vinovskis
Professor
University of Michigan

Improving the Odds:

A Report on Title I from the Independent Review Panel

January 2001

Acknowledgments

While this report is the product of the members of the Independent Review Panel, many organizations and individuals contributed to the final product. Staff at Policy Studies Associates, specifically Michael Rubenstein, were of great assistance. Michael, working in cooperation with panel member Joyce Benjamin and a committee of IRP members, was responsible for the numerous drafts and the final product.

Staff at the Planning and Evaluation Service (PES) of the Department of Education assisted and worked with us at every step. They also graciously accepted our recommendations on improving evaluation plans, a process that should result in improved evaluation studies and better information for policymakers and practitioners. Thanks go to Alan Ginsburg, Director of PES, but especially to Ricky Takai, director of the division of elementary and secondary education in PES, and Stephanie Stullich of his office. They have been tireless in support of the panel and met every request with grace, good humor, and above all, professionalism. Each of them embodies what is best about public service and each deserves special commendation.

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National Assessment of Title I

INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL

Christopher Cross
Chair of the Independent Review Panel
Council for Basic Education
Washington, DC

Joyce Benjamin
Vice-Chair of the Independent Review Panel
Oregon Department of Education

Eva Baker
University of California at Los Angeles
Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing

Rolf Blank
Council of Chief State School Officers
Washington, DC

David Cohen
University of Michigan
School of Education

George Cornell
New Jersey Catholic Conference

Sharon Darling
National Center for Family Literacy
Louisville, KY

Bill Demmert
Western Washington University
Woodring College of Education

Joyce Epstein
Johns Hopkins University
Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Susan Fuhrman
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education

John Jennings
Center on Education Policy
Washington, DC

Joseph Johnson
University of Texas at Austin, Dana Center

Diana Lam
Superintendent
Providence (RI) School Department

Wayne Martin
Council of Chief State School Officers
State Education Assessment Center

Phyllis McClure
Independent Consultant
Washington, DC

Jesse Montano
Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning

Jennifer O'Day
University of Wisconsin at Madison
Department of Education Policy Studies

Andrew Porter
University of Wisconsin at Madison
Wisconsin Center for Education Research

Linda Rodriguez
(Former) Pasco County School Board
Land O'Lakes, FL

Richard Ruiz
University of Arizona
College of Education

Ramsay Selden
Education Statistical Services Institute
Washington, DC

Maris Vinovskis
University of Michigan
Department of History

22 January 2001

Chairman John A. Boehner
Committee on Education and Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Jim M. Jeffords
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boehner and Chairman Jeffords:

In the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, P.L. 103-382, Congress called for the creation of a panel of researchers, policymakers, and other interested parties to advise the U.S. Department of Education on the evaluation of programs authorized under that statute. In fact, panels were called for in two sections of the law. For the purposes of organization and clarity, these two panels were combined into a single body knows as the Independent Review Panel (IRP).

While the authorizing statute creating the panel does not require a report, the panel was unanimous in wanting to take this opportunity to express its own views on a number of topics expressly related to the forthcoming reauthorization of ESEA, especially Title I. This report follows and updates a report we issued in 1999.

By design, this report does not contain any original evaluation or research data. That is the province of the reports issued by the Department of Education, including *High Standards for All Children: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I on Progress and Challenges Since the 1994 Reauthorization* (2001). *Promising Results, Continuing Challenges: The Final Report of the National Assessment of Title I* (1999). and *Federal Education Legislation Enacted in 1994: An Evaluation of Implementation and Impact* (1999) Rather, the panel has chosen both to express its own interpretation of the data and to raise issues and concerns that, by their very nature, were not included in the evaluation reports.

One of our important functions is to serve, both to the Department of Education and the Congress, as an expert group advising on the qualities of good evaluation, the limitations of what can be done and a collective conscience of the need for adequate funding of evaluation and research in these important areas of education.

We urge the reader to examine the data contained in the separate reports issued by the Department of Education as a guide to the issues raised herein, as well as for a fuller understanding of what evaluation data is available and what information will be forthcoming.

Finally, there are many, many people who made the work of the IRP possible. Rather than enumerate them here, we have chosen to devote a separate page for those acknowledgements. The panel joins me in thanking each and every one for their work and their dedication to this report.

Sincerely,

Christopher T. Cross
Chairman, Independent Review Panel and
President, Council for Basic Education

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For Further Information, Contact Christopher Cross
Council for Basic Education
1319 F Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20004-1152
Tel: (202) 347-4171; Fax: (202) 347-5047

Summary of Recommendations

In this report, the Congressionally mandated Independent Review Panel (IRP) that advises the Secretary of Education offers a number of recommendations for Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as it was modified under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. The report is based on considerable research and evaluations of this program for low-income pre-K-12 students undertaken during the last six years. Early evidence from these evaluations indicates that the standards-based approach in Title I may be beginning to work. The IRP's recommendations are intended to increase the effectiveness of standards-based education reform and Title I, which is up for reauthorization this year.

The IRP recommends that:

- **States should seek guidance and other technical assistance from content and assessment experts to help formulate, review, and refine their educational content and student performance standards.**

- **States and school districts should ensure that teachers and principals in high-poverty schools are at least as qualified as those in other schools, improve pre-service teacher education, and provide sustained, coherent, and pedagogical knowledge to teachers through professional development.**

- **Title I policy should reinforce and strengthen state systems of holding schools and districts accountable for having the same challenging standards for low-income students as they have for other students, while providing adequate flexibility for schools and districts to devise appropriate strategies to meet these standards.**

- **Efforts to build and strengthen partnerships among schools, families, and communities should be continued.**

- **Because federal support can only begin to close the resource gap between rich and poor schools, Title I funding should be significantly increased and Title I dollars should be targeted at the highest-poverty districts and schools with the most poor students.**

- **Increased federal and other support is needed for research and evaluation of education, including longitudinal studies of student achievement, and to establish an effective system for collecting and analyzing federal program data.**

Introduction

The contemporary federal role in elementary and secondary education is 35 years old, dating to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Title I of that Act provides funds to the nation's schools that have high concentrations of children from low-income families in order to pay the extra costs of educating educationally disadvantaged students. Today, Title I remains the largest source of federal aid for pre-K-12 education, $9.5 billion in FY 2001, representing 38 percent of all federal support for pre-collegiate education. Although Title I (known as Chapter 1 from 1981 to 1994) is large in terms of federal expenditures, it represents only 2.4 percent of total national expenditures for elementary and secondary education.

Title I Part A funds reach 45,000 schools in 13,000 school districts and serve more than 12.5 million children. Included in the 12.5 million participants are approximately 193,000 private school students, 300,000 migrant children, 100,000 children identified as homeless, and more than 3 million students who are limited English proficient. Title I also serves 40,000 children and 31,000 adults in the Even Start Family Literacy Program (Part B); 621,000 children of migrant farm laborers and fishers (Part C); and 200,000 children in institutions for neglected and delinquent children. By racial and ethnic classification, Title I participants are 35 percent white, not of Hispanic origin; 29 percent Hispanic; 29 percent African American; 2 percent Native American and Alaskan Native; 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent other.

In its first 30 years (1965-1995), Title I operated, as a matter of law and practice, largely as an isolated program with separate services, lower expectations, and different testing requirements. Title I's separate status tied federal dollars to eligible students, so that federal funds provided supplementary aid only to eligible students rather than general aid to all students, which is a responsibility of state and local governments. Title I students were selected based on their test scores (usually the bottom quartile) and were typically provided with 30 minutes a day of remedial instruction in low-level basic skills in separate rooms by Title I staff. The program was considered successful if participants did not fall further behind. No matter how good the Title I Chapter 1 program may have been, 30 minutes a day could not compensate for a watered-down curriculum, ineffective instructional practices, poorly trained staff, and low expectations that prevailed for the remainder of the school day.

The law's requirement for allocating funds was a disincentive to raising student achievement. Schools were eligible for funding based on their percentage of poor children, but the amount of funds they received depended on their numbers of low-scoring Title I students. If those scores rose, Title I funds were reallocated to other students and schools with lower scores.

While basic reading and math skills—the focus of Title I instruction—were once sufficient for employment and postsecondary schooling, changes in the American economy demand higher educational attainment. In addition to being able to read and do simple math, students need higher-order skills—the ability to think, to solve problems, and to comprehend complicated text. Poor and educationally disadvantaged students will be severely compromised in the new economy unless they are provided a far more challenging curriculum that enables them to acquire these higher-order skills.

In the early 1990s, in response to increasing concern about the quality of American education, some states began to revamp their education systems to require higher standards for all children. As a separate program with lower expectations, Title I Chapter 1 was an impediment to standards-based reform. This led Congress to make substantial revisions to Title I in the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, which reauthorized the program.

This report comments on findings from research and evaluations of both the implementation and the changes that IASA made to Title I, with a particular focus on findings released since 1999. It is offered by the Independent Review Panel (IRP), a Congressionally mandated, non-partisan panel of educators, researchers, and policy experts that advises the Secretary of Education on issues related to the evaluation of federal education programs. The IRP's mandate was to advise the Department of Education on the evaluation of the reauthorized Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and certain other provisions of IASA. This report supplements the April 1999 report by the IRP that presented observations and recommendations for policy changes based on earlier research findings. The current report emphasizes some of those recommendations and adds several others based on findings presented in the U.S. Department of Education's 2001 report, *High Standards for All Students: A Report From the National Assessment of Title I on Progress and Challenges Since the 1994 Reauthorization*.

Rather than presenting new data, however, this report draws from *High Standards for All Students* to frame key issues related to the new approach to educational improvement embodied in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA and to propose improvements in federal policy. It begins with a review of the changes that Congress made to the Title I program in 1994, particularly its mandate to raise standards for all children, including those served by Title I. This is followed by a listing of the guiding assumptions behind the new approach to Title I, which makes it easier to judge whether the assumptions have proven true. The report then discusses ways in which implementation at the state and local level is not complete. The final section offers some policy recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of standards-based reform and the new Title I.

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What Changes Did Congress Make to Title I in 1994?

The law was rewritten to state explicitly that educationally disadvantaged students served by Title I should be held to the same academic standards as other children. To accomplish this purpose, the law requires that states develop content standards that define what all children are expected to know and be able to do. Those standards were devised under state law or the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1993. In addition, the law requires states to develop performance standards that define how well students are achieving the content standards. States were then to develop assessments aligned with their standards by 2001. State assessments must include Title I children, including those who are disabled or limited-English proficient, with any necessary accommodations, in order to measure student performance against state standards.[1]

The U.S. Department of Education approves the process for developing and adopting assessments, but not the content or assessment instruments themselves. Evidence of full inclusion of disabled[1] and limited-English proficient students in state assessments must be submitted to the Department as a condition for receiving Title I funds.

States are also required to develop criteria for holding schools and districts accountable for student performance and to provide assistance to schools that are identified as in need of improvement according to their yardstick. The accountability measure, known as adequate yearly progress, requires substantial and continuous progress for all students, especially economically disadvantaged and limited-English proficient students, so that they will achieve proficiency on state standards within a defined time frame. Because states are responsible for developing the capacity of Title I schools in need of improvement, they must supply the ingredients necessary to enable students in those schools to make progress toward state standards.

Another accountability feature is the requirement that test scores from state assessments be disaggregated by student categories and publicly reported on school profiles. These data focus attention on student outcomes and progress, while providing parents, school officials, and state policy makers with information for decision-making.

The *quid pro quo* for accountability is flexibility. School officials have considerable latitude in deciding how to use Title I resources. Dollars do not have to be tied to specific students. Title I funds can be combined with state and local funds in order to carry out comprehensive reform and upgrade the entire instructional program in schools with 50 percent or more low-income pupils. If they inhibit reform, most federal rules can be waived.

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[1] The reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act in 1997 joined Title I in requiring that state standards apply to special education students and that they be included in state assessments.

With the focus on student achievement and the integration of Title I into the states' education reform agenda for all students, the intent of the 1994 reauthorization is to substantially improve outcomes for the lowest achieving students.

Expanded Federal Support 1994-2000

Since passage of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, Congress has enacted or funded other measures to further support teaching and learning. These include:

- The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program for schools, especially those with high concentrations of poor children, to adopt proven reform models for whole school reform (1998);
- The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which provides grants to establish or expand centers in rural and inner-city schools to benefit the educational, health, cultural, and recreational needs of the community (1998);
- Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, authorized under Title II of the Higher Education Act reauthorization, which are designed to support the efforts of states, institutions of higher education, and school districts to strengthen the recruitment, preparation, licensing, and support of new teachers (1998);
- Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), a program authorized under the Higher Education Act reauthorization that provides competitive grants to encourage "at-risk" middle schoolers to prepare for high school graduation and apply to college (1998);
- The Reading Excellence Act, a competitive grant program that awards grants to states for the purpose of making subgrants to local initiatives with the ultimate goal of ensuring that all children will be able to read by the third grade (1999);
- The Class Size Reduction Program for early grades, which, through a waiver, also may be used to support professional development (1999);
- The Even Start Statewide Family Literacy Grants for states to coordinate all their literacy efforts, including those funded under Head Start and the Adult and Family Literacy Act (1999); and
- The Title I Accountability Grants program, which provide funds for turning around low-performing schools and also requires Title I districts to provide school choice options for students in Title I schools designated in need of improvement (2000).

What is Standards-Based Reform?

Standards-based reform is an approach to improving student achievement nationwide by implementing three major components, which are:

- Establishing high academic standards that all students are expected to meet
- Enacting policies that are designed to help all students achieve those standards, and
- Providing local schools with the flexibility they need to help their students achieve the standards in exchange for increased accountability for their success

States began moving toward standards-based reform in public education after the 50 governors met with President Bush at the National Education Summit in 1989 and jointly endorsed six National Education Goals. In 1994, President Clinton and Congress made this framework for education reform the basis for the reauthorized ESEA and companion legislation designed to support states' efforts to develop challenging academic standards. Those state standards, in turn, were to form the core of a new approach to education that focused curriculum, instruction, teacher preparation and professional development, and assessment around helping all students meet the higher standards set for them. The passage of time, the emergence of preliminary data from this national experiment, and the pending reauthorization of the ESEA in 2001 make this an ideal time to review progress and reassess needs. With student achievement improving in many schools and districts that have made progress in implementing the components of standards-based reform, the picture offers hope. However, the sobering reality is that many states have not raised their academic standards to a high enough level, especially in low-performing schools, and few have sufficiently aligned their curriculum development, student assessment, and teacher preparation efforts with their standards.

The standards-based reform model incorporated in the reauthorized ESEA begins with states setting high standards for what all students should know and be able to do when they graduate from high school and at key intervals before they reach that point. To ensure that state standards encompass sufficient depth and breadth of knowledge, the states can rely on content standards released by national professional associations and other sources. The resulting state content standards can include objectives for student learning that are unique to particular disciplines (e.g., understanding of particular historical trends or ability to solve specific kinds of mathematical problems) as well as objectives that cut across content areas (e.g., the ability to write persuasively). Those standards then become the basis for new curricula that move students in a coherent manner through the realm of knowledge and skills laid out for them. To determine if students have indeed learned what they are supposed to learn, the legislation requires states to develop assessment systems that reliably measure how well students have mastered the content. Part of that process entails developing performance standards, which answer the question: How good is good enough? Recognizing the importance of high-quality classroom instruction in helping

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students achieve the standards, states should invest in preparing teachers to teach the content included in the standards at a sufficiently high level. Additional resources may need to be targeted to assist schools and students that are struggling to meet the standards. In exchange for greater flexibility and local discretion regarding how to move students toward meeting the standards, the legislation includes mechanisms to hold schools accountable for their performance.

What are the Guiding Assumptions Underlying the New Title I?

The standards-based reform model underlying the new Title I program rests on several key assumptions about what is possible. The vision for public education embodied by standards-based reform is very different from the way public education has traditionally functioned. Instead of allowing schools to operate separate Title I programs—with their own academic standards—for low-achieving children, the reauthorized ESEA requires states receiving Title I funds to set the same academic standards for all students, including Title I students. It also gives them additional resources and flexibility so they can help students reach those standards in ways they deem appropriate. Rather than measuring how well students perform in relation to each other, the new ESEA asks each state to measure how well students do compared with how well the state expects them to do. The assumptions necessary for this transformation to occur fall into five major categories: (1) high standards for all children and an aligned educational system; (2) a focus on teaching and learning; (3) flexibility in exchange for accountability; (4) linkages among schools, parents, and communities; and (5) targeted resources.

Standards Development and Alignment

Educators and the public can agree on content standards. Most people agree that schools should teach students a certain body of knowledge and the skills to use that knowledge to reason and solve problems. There is less agreement, however, on what should be included in the body of knowledge or the relative weight to be given to basic and advanced skills. If content standards—statements of what all students need to know and be able to do in and across content areas—are to form the centerpiece of a new educational system, there must be broad public agreement about those standards. Without such agreement, the educational system will not have a common set of standards around which to structure its curriculum, assessment, professional development, and financing.

Standards can be focused and coherent. This assumes that the diverse stakeholders involved in setting the standards can blend their differing perspectives in a way that generates clear, coherent standards that can be used to develop new curricula and assessments. Successful standards can not be muddled statements that gloss over differences or conflict with each other. If they are to succeed, standards can delineate clear and unequivocal priorities, and send unambiguous messages to teachers.

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students, and parents that certain academic knowledge and skills are essential. If students can not achieve the standards within reasonable boundaries of time and resources, the educational system will be overburdened.

Aligning all the elements of the educational system with high content standards will generate improvements in student learning. Classroom instruction and student performance can be improved by dedicating such elements as assessment systems, professional development for teachers, and extended learning time for students to helping all children reach the standards. Alignment presumes that many of the resources necessary for a world-class educational system are already available, but lack a unified focus and therefore do not contribute as much as they could to student learning. Reallocating those resources—and adding resources to fill in gaps in the system—to better support teachers and students can have profound positive effects on learning.

A Focus on Teaching and Learning

Students from all backgrounds can do more challenging work when provided with a high quality curriculum and appropriate instruction. Growing evidence from places as diverse as El Paso and New York City shows that students, especially low-income and minority students, respond with improved performance when more is expected of them. What they need is a curriculum that challenges them and teachers and parents who support them. That places the burden on school systems to give students the opportunity to excel in school instead of confining them to dead-end classes that do not prepare them either for college or the workplace.

A challenging curriculum can incorporate both higher-order thinking and basic skills. The presumption that often guides curriculum development is that students must master the basics before moving on to more advanced work. Certainly, most learning requires a minimum set of knowledge and skills to move forward. However, many students are confined to basic skills instruction because they fail to reach arbitrary levels of mastery, and never get the opportunity to see how those skills can be used in interesting and exciting ways. For example, in math and science, exposing students early to more advanced work that requires them to practice and apply basic skills to solve problems or answer complex questions can move them forward at a faster pace than endlessly drilling them on basic facts.

Students will learn best when their teachers know the content areas they teach, are able to teach that content to a broad range of students, and understand how their students learn. Too many secondary school teachers either do not have a college major in the area they teach or are not certified to teach that discipline. Too many elementary school teachers are not adequately prepared to teach reading and math, the core of a strong elementary education. Even if they do have strong knowledge of their content area, many teachers have not had enough practice using diverse teaching methods to facilitate

students' understanding of the content. Different students learn in different ways and may need the same content presented differently so that they each can understand it. Teachers also need to understand how the different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds that students bring to the classroom affect behavior and learning. Ideally, teachers know how to take advantage of student diversity in their classrooms to create rich learning environments for all students.

Schools can improve the quality of teaching by investing in high-quality professional development. Not every teacher is an effective teacher, but this assumption holds that adequate support for teachers can improve their performance in the classroom. Elements of that support system include strong instructional leadership by principals or other school administrators who understand how to foster and support effective classroom teaching. Moreover, according to research by the U.S. Department of Education and others, high-quality professional development prepares teachers for the specific challenges outlined above when it (1) is of sufficient length, frequency, and intensity; (2) revolves around helping teachers move their students toward their state's content and performance standards; (3) gives teachers a central role in planning their own professional development; and (4) provides teachers with ample opportunity to practice new skills and activities.

Schools can expand instructional time available for students who need extra help to achieve the standards. Children develop the cognitive and emotional maturity necessary to achieve high academic standards at different rates. Some may need additional time or assistance from teachers or tutors to master content that is difficult for them. Yet not all schools are prepared to offer assistance beyond that normally available in the classroom. Scarce classroom space, a shortage of teachers, and transportation considerations impinge on some schools' ability to help students before or after school or to carve out additional instructional time during the school day. However, a focus on teaching and learning implies that such time and resources be available to students who need extra time and help.

Flexibility and Accountability

Offering schools greater flexibility in exchange for accountability can drive improvements in student learning. Giving schools more flexibility to educate their students as they see fit rests on the assumption that schools will have the resources and support they need to take advantage of that flexibility. Each school is different and serves a unique mix of students, so letting each school tailor its program to its students' needs is desirable and can lead to improved student achievement. At the same time, if the other elements of standards-based reform (high standards, aligned curriculum and assessment, well-trained teachers, and targeted resources) are not in place, a school's capacity to use flexibility to its advantage may be limited.

Large-scale assessments can accurately measure how much progress students make toward meeting the standards. New assessments must be able to measure not only what students know, but also what they can do with that knowledge. Traditional paper-and-pencil tests can measure how well students have learned a particular body of knowledge and skills, but not the knowledge and skills that are embodied in higher content and performance standards. Thus, assessments need to be redesigned, in many cases departing from the traditional paper-and-pencil formats to measure whether students meet the content and performance standards. Moreover, in addition to measuring student learning, these new assessments must offer valid measures of school performance—whether schools are making adequate yearly progress toward having all of their students reach the standards, as required by federal law. Designing these new assessments is a tremendous technical and financial challenge for many states. However, including such assessments in a standards-based system is crucial to measuring how well students can do things that our nation cares about.

Linkages Among Schools, Families, and Communities

Schools are uniquely positioned to bring together families and the community to support student learning in ways that reflect school goals and the community's diversity and values. Schools rely on families and communities to support and participate in children's education and to help all students reach high standards. At the same time, schools must be responsive to students' backgrounds and cultures, which can enrich student learning. All schools must plan and implement comprehensive partnership programs to inform and involve all families. Such programs include productive and culturally sensitive activities so that all families and communities become important partners with the schools in educating children.

Targeted Resources

The federal government has a critical role to play in providing supplemental resources to students in the greatest need of assistance. Standards-based reform recognizes that disadvantaged students may need additional resources (e.g., time, tutoring, and materials) to achieve the high standards set for all students. Therefore, it advocates targeting those resources where they are most needed to make sure that all students, not just a select few, can achieve the high standards. The federal government has long played a role in helping to reduce the gap in funding between schools in wealthy communities and schools in poorer communities. If students in high-poverty schools are to have an opportunity to reach the high standards set for them, the federal government will have to sustain, if not strengthen, its commitment to these students and their schools.

Is Standards-Based Reform Fully Implemented?

Despite significant progress made to date, standards-based reform remains a strategy that has been only partially implemented and not fully understood by policy makers or the public. In its report, *High Standards for All Students: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I*, the U.S. Department of Education presents significant evidence that states have made important strides in implementing the elements of standards-based reform. Virtually all states have developed content standards, about half have performance standards, and all are required by provisions of the 1994 amendments to Title I to have aligned assessment systems by the end of the 2000-2001 school year. Moreover, that report offers preliminary evidence that standards-based reform can have positive effects on student achievement. Nonetheless, progress in implementing the elements of standards-based reform has not come easily. The proliferation of content standards can be overwhelming to many teachers, especially elementary school teachers, who generally teach all major subject areas in self-contained classrooms. States and school districts have found it necessary to provide intensive support to low-performing schools, as mandated in the new legislation. States have struggled with the cost and technical challenge of creating valid and reliable assessments that are aligned with content standards and that accurately measure how well students master the skills and knowledge set forth in the standards. The following section explores in greater depth the shortcomings in the implementation of that model, leading to a discussion about the challenges that still lie ahead and effective strategies for addressing them.

The existence of federally mandated deadlines for the development of standards and assessment systems means that much of the states' focus has been on setting standards, developing assessments, and then holding schools, teachers, and students accountable for results on those assessments. In the absence of federal and state deadlines, less attention has been given to the need for increased professional support for teachers and academic support for low-performing students, both of which require substantial new investments. Also, little effort has been given to rethinking current strategies in light of the challenges presented in the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA. This section presents some of the ways in which the implementation of the standards-based approach remains unfinished business. The overarching message is that some of the assumptions presented earlier have not been adequately tested, and too many people have failed to address the problem.

Standards Development and Alignment

Several studies conclude that there is substantial variation in the quality and rigor of state content standards. Almost all states have standards in place, but most external reviewers of those standards (including the American Federation of Teachers, the Council for Basic Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Fordham Foundation, and ACHIEVE) conclude that at least some of

them are not clear or are not challenging (i.e., the assumption that all states will develop standards that are focused and coherent has not held true). Thus, in some states, students may be mastering a set of content and skills that will not adequately prepare them for challenging careers or postsecondary education.

Too often, states have chosen to use assessments that are not aligned with their standards. Because states are still in the process of developing and implementing new assessments, it is difficult to assess their overall quality and progress. Nonetheless, the sheer cost and technical challenge of developing a whole new class of valid and reliable assessments aligned with content standards have led some states to use commercial tests that have little connection to their standards. Because these tests are developed and sold for broader national use, they may not reflect the full depth and breadth of a particular state's standards, which diminishes the significance of the state's standards. Thus, the assumption that assessments can accurately measure students' progress toward meeting standards, while not disproved, has not been fully confirmed either.

States have had difficulty developing student performance standards, the benchmarks to denote ranges of proficiency on the content standards. States have not had sufficient experience with this requirement to judge adequately the degree of improvement that should be expected of schools. In the absence of such information, states may be establishing student performance standards that are either too low or too high. This is an area that needs further research.

A Focus on Teaching and Learning

The professional development that states are providing to teachers is not sufficient to meet the challenge of helping all students achieve high academic standards. Professional development should be a cornerstone of the new reform model, but it has been overshadowed by demands for greater school accountability. Unfortunately, teachers are often expected to upgrade their skills and transform their teaching largely on their own. The expectation is that increased accountability will motivate them to change, but accountability addresses only motivation, not capacity for change. Some teachers, especially those in schools with high concentrations of low-income students, are not familiar enough with the content they are expected to teach, and may not find leadership in the school to help them improve. Many teachers also are not familiar with strategies that are effective for teaching the new content to their students, especially when their students represent a mix of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Only a coordinated commitment to providing teachers with sustained professional support that is linked to the standards can spawn the kind of changes that Congress envisioned in 1994, but such support has been sorely lacking. Indeed, as *High Standards for All Students: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I* indicates, school districts spend four times as much of their Title I funds on administering the program as they do on professional development for teachers. Data are not available on whether schools

designated as being in need of improvement are setting aside 10 percent of their Title I allocation for professional development, as required by federal law.

The support that has been available to teachers so far does not reflect the principles of high-quality professional development. As the evaluation of the Eisenhower professional development program points out, the vast majority of professional development opportunities for teachers are not of sufficient duration or intensity to generate significant improvements in teaching. According to the evaluation, most professional development consists of one-time workshops without follow-up or interaction with other teachers, and only about one-half of these events address teachers' need for more expertise in their content areas. In short, the assumption that teachers must be familiar with the content they teach is not being addressed to the extent necessary.

Flexibility and Accountability

Too many state accountability policies rely too heavily on results from a single test to determine which schools are failing to improve. Many states use assessment results from a single state test—often traditional multiple-choice tests. Although these tests may have an important place in state assessment systems, they rarely capture the depth and breadth of knowledge reflected in state content standards. Also, many accountability systems use results from only a small number of subject areas (i.e., reading and math) to make important decisions about rewards and sanctions for schools. The absence of multiple measures of school progress that incorporate the full extent of state content standards may yield invalid conclusions about which schools are achieving adequate yearly progress. Also of concern, six years after passage of the 1994 amendments, most states have not developed measures of adequate yearly progress that comply with the law.

Accountability criteria are extremely uneven across the states, confounding efforts to target resources at low-performing schools. In reauthorizing ESEA, Congress sought to give states more flexibility to determine which schools are in need of improvement. As expected, states have responded by using a wide range of criteria for identifying low-performing schools. In some states, as few as 2 percent of schools have been designated in need of improvement, whereas in other states more than 50 percent have been identified. This range suggests that in some states there are many low-performing schools that are not being identified and consequently not getting the help they need. Conversely, in states that identify over half of their schools, it is unclear whether the state can actually provide support to all those schools. Some states' practice of operating parallel accountability systems for Title I and all other schools using different criteria has resulted in situations where a school is designated as low-performing under one system but not the other.

Specific information about special populations (e.g., migrant students, students with limited English proficiency, Native American students) is necessary to determine whether standards-based reform is producing results for students historically served by Title I. Once states establish their final assessment systems, they are required to disaggregate and publicly report the results of those assessments by categories of students: race, gender, poverty, limited-English proficiency, disability, and migrant status. They were not required to disaggregate results from their transitional assessments. Until such data are available, there is no evidence about the effects of standards-based reform for students who have been least well served. This is especially critical for the 45 percent of all Title I schools that are operating schoolwide programs.

Linkages Among Schools, Families, and Communities

Schools across the country have inadequate programs to involve families and communities in children's education at school and at home. Well-planned and implemented programs are especially lacking in high-poverty schools. Parents are indeed their children's first teachers, but many families need help in preparing children for formal schooling. Children who do not begin school ready to learn are likely to remain permanently behind. Once children are in school, schools rely on families and community partners to reinforce the importance of schools and the lessons taught. Too few schools guide parents and other family members on conducting learning activities with their children at home or welcome family members as productive volunteers at school.

Title I schools have not cultivated a sense of shared responsibility for education among parents, community members, and their own staffs. Although some Title I schools use parent-school compacts to communicate with parents, they have not been incorporated into well-planned, ongoing partnership programs. Some schools use compacts to try to increase parent accountability, rather than to communicate shared responsibilities for student success. Title I schools could do far more to learn about the diverse backgrounds of their students' families and to communicate with the families of migrant and limited-English proficient students. The most effective partnerships are planned and implemented by teams of teachers, parents and administrators who work together to select activities that are aligned with school improvement goals.

Targeted Resources

Federal funds are not sufficiently concentrated in the neediest school districts. As mentioned earlier, changes in intra-district targeting requirements have meant that, within districts, the highest-poverty schools are getting a greater share of Title I and other federal funds than before. However, those funds are still being spread too broadly among school districts, so too many districts with relatively small

proportions of disadvantaged students are still getting Title I assistance. This dilutes the program's effectiveness by reducing its role in the districts with the highest proportions of disadvantaged students. There are two major reasons for this. First, hold-harmless provisions in appropriations bills mean that the federal government cannot reduce Title I allocations to any school district, so funds can not be shifted from low-poverty districts to high-poverty districts. Second, Congress has not appropriated money for additional grants it authorized for districts with extremely high concentrations of poverty. If high-need districts are expected to achieve the same levels of performance as all other districts, a stronger federal commitment to targeting resources at these districts needs to be in place.

What Remains to Be Done: Recommendations of the Independent Review Panel

Standards Development and Alignment

States are off to a promising start developing high standards, but they need more technical assistance and other resources to build their capacity to formulate, review, and refine their standards.

- States should continue to consider the level of rigor reflected in their content and performance standards. States seeking additional guidance in upgrading their content standards can refer to disciplinary standards developed by groups like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, among others; the standards reflected in the SAT II, Advanced Placement, and NAEP tests; or, for a more global perspective, the standards required for an International Baccalaureate diploma.

- The appropriate role for the federal government to play in the standards development process is fostering discussion among states and between states and the community of experts on standards development. The federal government should continue to stay out of the business of rating state standards, as it is barred from doing under current law.

- The U.S. Department of Education, however, should continue to review and certify the designs of state assessment systems to ensure that they are aligned with their content standards, as required by the 1994 legislation. Better assessments for instructional and accountability purposes are urgently needed. Federal support for cross-state collaboration on assessment development would strengthen standards-based reform.

- The proliferation of new federal categorical programs, which are listed on page 4 and 5, has diminished educators' focus on standards-based reform. Some of these programs divert attention and resources away from helping students achieve high standards. For these reasons, any new programs enacted by Congress should be targeted at helping states implement standards-based reform, especially in the most disadvantaged schools.

A Focus on Teaching and Learning

As in every other aspect of education, the quality of teachers and other staff is crucial to the effectiveness of Title I.

- Because high-poverty schools need and deserve the best leaders and instructors, states and districts should be required to ensure that principals and teachers in high-poverty schools are at least as qualified as those in non-Title I schools.

- States need to develop coherent approaches to improving both pre-service teacher education and professional development that give teachers the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and understanding of students that they need to be effective teachers. Professional development must be sustained, interactive, collaborative, research-based, and, above all, related to the standards and curriculum for which teachers are responsible. Rhetoric about giving teachers and schools flexibility is empty if teachers don't have the knowledge, skills, and experience to take advantage of that flexibility.

- Congress should not allow districts to spend federal funds to hire paraprofessionals to provide instruction, as they generally lack the qualifications for that role. Congress should begin to phase out districts' use of paraprofessionals in instructional capacities altogether during the next reauthorization. The only exception should be situations where bilingual aides are the only adults who actually speak and understand the language of the children and can facilitate communication between students and teachers.

Flexibility and Accountability

All levels of government have placed increased attention on holding schools and districts—and even federal agencies—accountable for results. This attention to results is appropriate and desirable, but it must be coupled with adequate flexibility for states and districts. Accountability for schools also must be based on legitimate and coherent criteria, adequate support for improvement, and appropriate authority, if it is to be effective.

- The law's insistence on holding schools and districts accountable for having the same challenging standards for low-income students as they have for other students is essential to improving student learning. This should include giving Title I students access to a rich curriculum in all subject areas, not just reading and mathematics.

- Title I policy should reinforce and strengthen state systems of accountability, including encouraging states to use multiple measures of student achievement to determine which schools achieve adequate yearly progress. Title I also should urge states to use the same accountability standards, sanctions and rewards, and systems of support for Title I schools that they use for all other schools. The concept of accountability should be expanded to include providing adequate support to help schools address weaknesses identified after a thorough analysis of relevant student performance data.

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- States should hold schools accountable for providing adequate instruction to students with limited proficiency in English. The most direct way to accomplish this goal is to require that language minority students take state assessment tests—after allowing them sufficient time to learn English and/or offering accommodations for their limited proficiency in English—and that their scores be included in determining which schools are in need of improvement.

- The adequate yearly progress standards established by each state should be sufficiently rigorous to ensure that schools meeting those standards are making real progress in improving student achievement. States also should be establishing adequate yearly progress criteria for school districts, as required by the 1994 legislation.

Linkages Among Schools, Families, and Communities

The directions set for Title I in 1994 reflected an understanding of the importance of fostering strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities. This effort should be continued

- States, districts, and schools must make the necessary investments in staff, programs, and evaluations to fully implement Title I's mandates for comprehensive and ongoing school, family, and community partnerships to promote student success. Redirecting attention away from the confusing and often mechanical term of "school-parent compact" is essential if districts or schools are to establish clear policies, planned programs, and useful evaluations of school, family, and community partnerships.

Targeted Resources

Title I plays a crucial, but necessarily supplemental, role in supporting efforts to improve achievement among poor children and to move all students toward challenging standards. Title I dollars (representing an average of $460 per student per year) do not come close to closing the resource gap between rich and poor schools. States and localities, which pay for more than 90 percent of the cost of elementary and secondary education, must be primarily responsible for closing the resource gap, but often have failed to do so.

- Title I should be fully funded, which would increase the appropriation from approximately $9.5 billion to about $24 billion, according to the Congressional Research Service. Although this goal is ambitious, the nation's lowest-performing schools need extraordinary assistance to provide their children with the same educational opportunities available in schools with better funding. In the absence of full funding for Title I, Congress should consider eliminating the hold-harmless provision that keeps the federal government from concentrating Title I funds in the highest-poverty districts.

- Funds should be targeted at schools with high proportions of poor students. In addition, the targeted grants that were authorized by Congress in 1994, but which have never been funded, should be appropriated in the next funding cycle

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- Since the inception of Title I, the participation of private school children has been guided by the principles of providing direct benefits to the child and public trusteeship of the dollars. These principles are sound. Public school officials should be encouraged to attend carefully to their responsibility in selecting students for participation and in consulting with private school officials about how private school students will be served under Title I. Title I programs face real costs in arranging for this service delivery, and the Independent Review Panel supports the continued availability of funds under Title I to defray those costs.

- Finally, states and the federal government should carefully monitor the allocation of funds and the provision of services for other special populations served by Title I, including students with limited English proficiency and those who are migrant, Native American, or neglected or delinquent.

Research and Evaluation

The IRP became all too aware of the scarcity of resources for research and evaluation in education as this report was prepared. The research, information, and evaluation base was inadequate to responsibly advise Congress on the issues addressed in this and the Department of Education's reports. Pertinent studies were too few and marginally funded, and the broader research base that could be used was spare. This is in marked contrast to levels of support for such research and evaluation in other sectors.

- Congress should set aside 0.5 percent of Title I funds, half for evaluation and half for research and development. This would make $40 million available for such efforts—a reasonable amount—compared to the $9 million currently being spent.

- Evaluation activities should include longitudinal studies of Title I that measure the achievement of participating students over time and in ways that determine effects. They also should include studies that identify gaps in the implementation of the 1994 provisions and that inform practice early in the next reauthorization period.

- Funding is also needed for research and development efforts that identify effective practices and refine model programs for wider implementation.

- Finally, funding is needed to implement a system to improve the quality, timeliness, and accuracy of federal education program data. An electronic information system would substantially reduce the paperwork burden on state and local education agencies.

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